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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 005118

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/26/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: ON-AGAIN, OFF-AGAIN PEACE TALKS WITH ELN SET TO  
RESUME JULY 14

REF: BOGOTA 4995

Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker - Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. The on-again, off-again peace talks between the GOC and ELN are set to resume July 14. ELN negotiator Palbo Beltran said in an interview the ELN was willing to agree to a cessation of hostilities and a release of hostages, but admitted that serious differences with the GOC on verification remain. The GOC saw the Beltran interview as a "rupture" and delayed talks to pressure the ELN on hostages and verification. Both sides met informally in Havana July 11 and 13, "trying to find north," and are set to simultaneously address concerns when formal talks resume. The GOC's primary goal is to free ELN hostages, and the weakened ELN has minimal leverage to press for concessions. End summary.

#### ELN Offers Cease-fire, Hostage Release

12. (U) Senior National Liberation Army (ELN) negotiators involved in the latest round of peace talks that began in mid-June in Havana said they are ready for a cessation of hostilities and to release ELN-held hostages. On July 2, "Semana" magazine published an interview with ELN negotiator Pablo Beltran. He said the process "had advanced," and the ELN hoped to resolve remaining differences with the GOC in July. He added that the ELN would release hostages as soon as a cessation of hostilities began, and that the ELN was conducting an "inventory" of the "small quantity" of hostages it held. He said differences remained with the GOC on verification, concentration of ELN forces, and criminal sanctions against ELN members.

#### Progress and Reassessment

13. (C) Moritz Akerman, who the GOC and ELN invited to Havana to observe the talks as a "guarantor," asserted that June talks had made "substantial progress" on a cease-fire and possible release of ELN-held hostages. Talks scheduled to reconvene on July 10 were suspended after the Beltran interview. GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told Akerman the interview showed a lack of seriousness in the process and represented a "rupture." Beltran told Akerman the interview was calculated to recapture attention from the GOC's June 4 release of senior FARC member Rodrigo Granda.

14. (C) Akerman said large differences remain on

verification. The GOC wants a defined zone for the identification of ELN fronts and fighters, and a permanent communication infrastructure to monitor ELN movements and avoid conflict. The ELN could not give the GOC an answer when asked how ELN urban fronts (what Akerman called "the base of any future ELN political movement") would be monitored. Akerman said ELN leaders were nonetheless confident most ELN fronts would agree to terms of a peace agreement, if one is signed. Still, he added the ELN leadership committee was privately concerned some ELN fronts in Narino known to be involved in drug trafficking could be a problem. Finally, Akerman said that negotiators had not discussed whether Justice and Peace Law provisions used to determine punishments in the paramilitary peace process would be applied to the ELN.

15. (C) The ELN has always insisted its members would not accept jail time as the Justice and Peace Law specifies. Moreover, if it negotiates a better deal than ex-paramilitaries, Colombia's constitutional practice of "favorability" would likely require that any less punitive terms for the ELN be applied retroactively to the ex-paras. Both GOC officials and members of the political opposition tell us they are aware that loosening penalties for ex-paras, even if due to "favorability," would cause President Alvaro Uribe political pain both domestically and in the international community.

Prospects: Talks Set for July 13

16. (C) On July 11 and 13, Restrepo met informally with Beltran in Havana to "try and find north" in the peace process. Akerman said the GOC "re-assessed" its suspension and the ELN was eager to resume formal talks. He said

Restrepo and Beltran agreed full negotiating teams would resume talks July 14 to simultaneously address concerns from both sides.

GOC Wants Hostages - ELN in Weak Position

17. (C) President Uribe reportedly has one goal and issued one order to Restrepo: Get back ELN kidnapping victims. All other goals with the ELN are secondary. The ELN's ability to attack the military, inflict casualties and kidnap has deteriorated (Reftel), and the ELN's leverage is limited. The GOC knows this and is not inclined to make concessions. Sergio Caramagna head of the OAS' Mission for Peace Process in Colombia (OAS-MAPP), told us the ELN process is unlikely to move forward soon. He said the GOC is focused on the FARC, and many ELN members think Beltran may be moving too quickly on a cease-fire and release of kidnap victims. Drucker